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ABSTRACT

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Minority Participation in Graduate Education:

A Social and Economic Imperative

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Abstract

The challenge for our future is to link our values and find common ground that encourages positive change. Education must no longer be a tool that simply serves public and private sector managers to preserve the authority of the privileged in large and small economies. Access to graduate education can become the bridge for developing common values in order to resolve the many complex issues we face. In the United States, education is the key to stimulating diverse populations that have the potential to build the wealth that benefits the economy and prepares for a prosperous future. This article asserts that promoting graduate education for minority students will help to address the growing economic chasm in today's society.

Introduction

Access to higher education for racial and ethnic minority students has developed incrementally. When one reviews the history, the observer sees the movement from segregated schools and the practice of separate but equal, to Affirmative Action laws that mandate integration of all school systems, and finally, today's attempts to turn back the clock with the challenge to Affirmative Action. This historical fight for education centers on values, full participation in the governance of the nation, and enhancement of quality of life. Education effectively creates and maintains a strong middle class that serves as the economic engine to stimulate growth and assure systemic stability. As the chart below reflects, individuals' ability to increase their income and status is associated with their ability to pursue and obtain an "associate, undergraduate, and graduate degree. Therefore, one of the most important purchases for people of color is the expenditure of their income for higher education. An econometric examination of the benefits of college to the cost of college clearly demonstrates that getting a degree enhances earning potential. The expenditure of income for undergraduate and graduate education is essential to the community and nation.

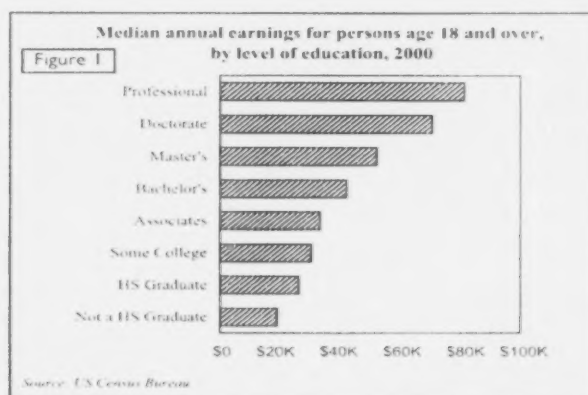


Table 1

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Education is the standard that establishes an improvement in the quality of life. With an educated populace, a nation reshapes the dynamic of its economy. As in the United States, it is so around the world, an educated populace strengthens the well being of the economy and stabilizes the government's ability to govern. This important lesson is one that the United States learned during the era of the sixties. Simply to leave any population behind is not wise. Every group in the nation needs to share in its prosperity or the nation risks the disruption of the economy by the disenfranchised.

The well-documented struggle by people of color continues in the United States. The Civil Rights legislation that opened the door for Blacks in America is less than fifty years old. Historian John Hope Franklin (1969) writes that in 1962 the Council of Economic Advisors estimated the overall cost of racial discrimination at about \$17.3 billion, or 3.2 per cent of the gross national product. The researcher continues that this cost resulted primarily from the failure to utilize fully the existing experience and skills of the total population and the failure to develop potential experience and skills fully (p. 642). History is clear that only with education can underrepresented groups navigate the path to higher heights in a free market economy.

Of particular importance is participation of students of color in graduate education. Graduate education produces research scholars, who explore various disciplines, including science, engineering, law, and medicine. As they prosper, others from the community will see the benefits in practice that education provides. More importantly, they demystify higher education in a community where a little over thirty years ago it may not have been a subject of discussion.

Roach (2001) reports that Black women numbered 971,000 and Black men 580,000 attending college in 1997. The numbers show that in 1997 the college student population was

62.6% female and 37.4% male. When compared to 1984 data from the U.S. Department of Education, Roach finds that 639,000 Black women and 437,000 Black men attended college, a 59.4 percent and 40.6 percent split (p. 19). Clearly, overall participation numbers are encouraging, but more study is necessary to understand the shrinking enrollment of males in higher education. Both men and women will be needed as researchers to address critical social and scientific issues in the minority community.

Minority Enrollment Status in Texas

The chart below looks at the Black and Hispanic graduate student enrollment at Texas Tech University.

TTU African-American & Hispanic Graduate Enrollment

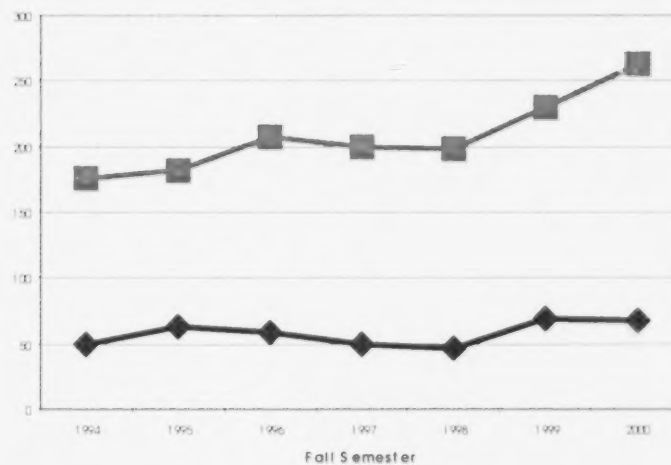


Table 2

◆ Black	■ Hispanic
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Source: OIR

The chart shows the trend of Black and Hispanic students from 1994 to 2000 attending Texas Tech University. Texas Tech is typical of institutions in Texas with increasing numbers of both Hispanic and Black students. Similar data can be found at the undergraduate level. Tienda and Simonella's (2001) study compares the 1999 enrollment level for African American and Hispanic freshmen returned to those of 1996, the year before Hopwood ended race-sensitive admissions policies (p. B13). Hopwood eliminates funds, grants, and slots set-aside for ethnic admissions. As in the Bakke decision in California, the court validates the concept of unfair practices when resources exclusively benefit one group to the detriment of another. As the chart indicates, the policy's outcome did not dampen the spirit of students of color toward getting an education. Texas Tech and other universities adjusted their policy to serve first generation under-represented populations to be within the guidelines of the courts decision. Texas Tech University understands the importance of diversity in the student population. It is important for universities to reach out to serve the first generation under-represented populations in the nation. This prepares future leaders to achieve for the welfare of the nation.

A Major Barrier to Graduate Enrollment

Research has identified a number of barriers to education. Chief among the barriers is the issue of funding. Students are increasingly required to fund a greater portion of their education. This has led to increased debt for students at the end of their program. Debt management is a serious issue for all students. It is conceivable that a student may create a debt level that prevents enjoyment of the benefits associated with education. The debt is so high that more than a third of take home salary may be allocated to repayment for a long period of time. Students must be

encouraged to enter the university with a financial plan and an exit strategy that maximize efficiency in managing cost.

St. John (1998) reported Black students were carrying a lighter debt load than their White and Asian peers. This may sound encouraging on the surface, however a deeper examination may reveal the lighter debt load is related to higher attrition rates. The researcher found that 69% of African Americans dropped out of college because of high loan debt. Additionally, 59% of the African American student loan borrowers felt "extremely" or "very" burdened by student loan payments (p. 1). In 1997, the student debt level for African Americans was \$16,800, compared to \$18,900 for Whites, and \$20,900 for Asian borrowers. The debt level for Hispanic borrowers was \$15,800 (p. 1).

If students come from families that have had wrenching problems with debt, the pressure on the students is quite burdensome and affects classroom performance. Due to having little or no real money management experience, the concept of deferred gratification challenges every value learned about not creating debt. A high percentage of students of color that come from families that live at or below the poverty line do not know the rules of survival and achievement in higher education. Nevertheless, universities need to include these students in the prosperity of a free economy. Opportunity in a society stabilizes the market. Through education, students have access to the best that their nation can offer.

If government fails to invest differently in education, there is little chance of reshaping the social landscape of a nation or country. Ferguson (1993) states that no industry or society may retain its dominance if the art of its management excludes individuals, through overt or subliminal acts, because of gender or ethnicity (p. 33). The large persistent problems that discourage interest in higher education must be harnessed to promote growth, health and literacy.

Texas is adjusting to a population trend that will alter the ethnic configuration of the state.

Percentage of Hispanics to the Total Population in Texas

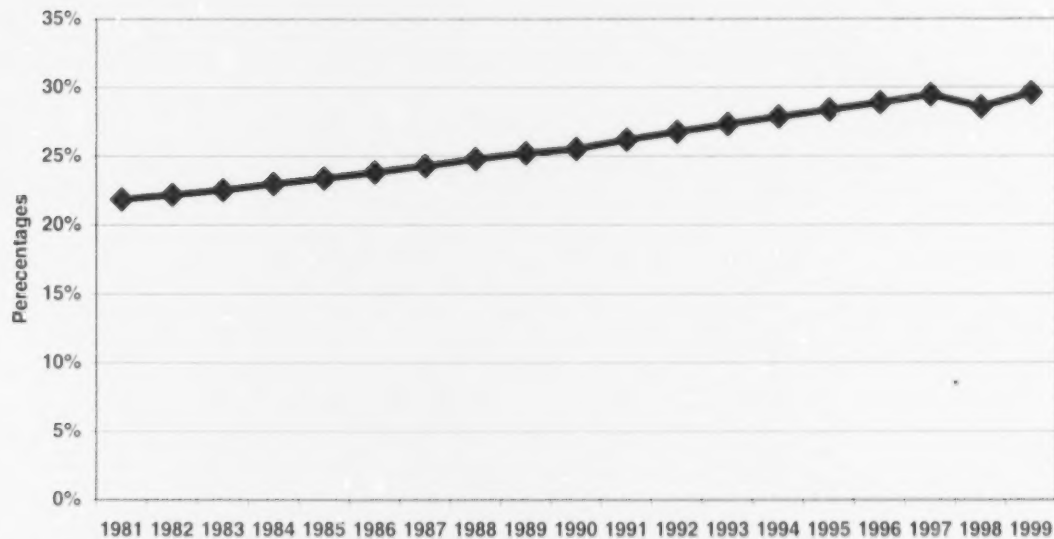


Table 3

Source: Texas Data Center

The changing demographics place a tremendous responsibility on educators, public officials, and business to design programs that benefit the interest of the people and state. If the state fails to address the population trend, it may put a strain on the social service system to the point of collapse. Imbedded in the failure to act is a less sophisticated voting population that will be apart of deciding what happens on complex ecological, commercial and public investment issues. An educated public will better serve the needs of the economy.

THE CHANGING FACE OF TEXAS

Here's how Texas' population breaks down by population and how demographers say it will change by 2030:

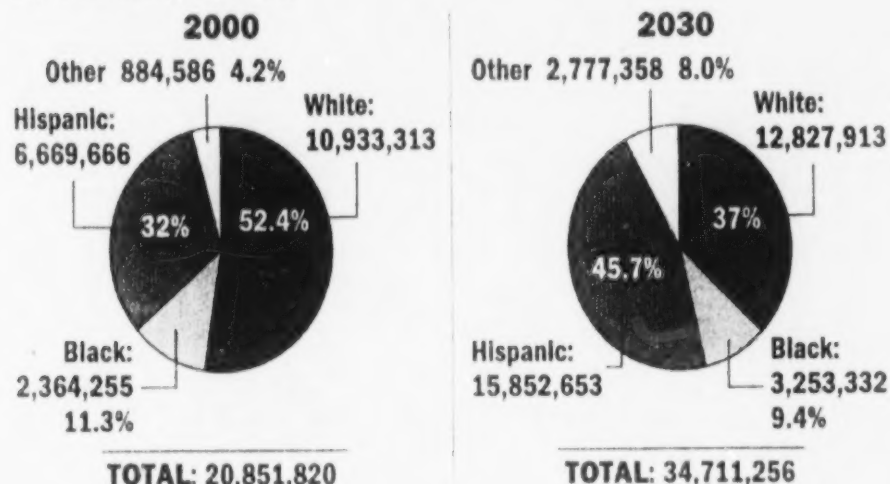


Table 4

NOTE: Percentages are rounded.

SOURCES: 2000 census; Texas State Data Center

The Texas State Data Center in 2000 census reports the current population breakdown as follows: Hispanic (32%), White (52.4%), Black (11.3%), and Other (4.2%). When the agency projects to 2030, the population trend appears as follows: Hispanic (45.7%), White (37%), Black (9.4%), and Other (8%). The outreach to all populations is dynamic. There is no end to the effort. As in Texas, the United States continues to address demographic issues that relate to trends in population movement and growth. If developing nations improve their higher education delivery, they will slow the drain of talent needed to drive the economy, stabilize industrial development, and strengthen their academic and technical training.

Summary

The rich and poor in all societies understand education as value and a valuable commodity. Having an education makes a difference in the level of individual achievement.

Change comes to a people through education. New horizons of opportunity are connected to higher education. In the United States or a less developed nation, the aspiration of its leadership is to improve the quality of life for the masses. Education is the most reliable instrument in the arsenal of tools that benefit a nation. Access is not a step but a process that moves forward with each achievement. It is vital that public and private sector manager assist in controlling the cost of education to greater inclusion of diverse peoples. There is too much at stake to leave anyone behind due to cost.

What is being done at all levels of education here is being done around the world. The expansion of consumerism relies on qualified professionals in high earning positions. Education increases that population of people to participate in the market. By advancing the delivery of education to a larger diverse population, it provides an opportunity to address pollution, health, and literacy with standardizes practices that may incorporate business interest.

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